

Caregiver Connection

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WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES, CHILDREN'S ADMINISTRATION

Child neglect and food hoarding

By Charley Joyce, LICSW and Rick Delaney, Ph.D.

Food hoarding is a common issue displayed by foster-adoptive children. Food hoarding can be central in a child's world and resistant to change. Additionally, hoarding food behavior can bedevil and bewilder parents. So why does a child hoard food?

Often food hoarding is directly connected to significant neglect that the child has experienced in consistently having their basic needs for life sustaining food denied or inadequately met. As a result, the child is forced to become prematurely self-reliant in meeting their own basic needs. For example, in a situation where the parent is chemically dependent, resulting in inconsistency in providing and having food available, it would be reasonable that when food is available that a child would view this as an opportunity. It would be logical that a survival mentality would develop, causing the child to respond to the availability of food by overeating or hoarding food. In neglectful situations, food hoarding is a wise alternative to ongoing food deprivation.

What can be confusing and frustrating to foster-adoptive parents is why food hoarding continues when the child is being properly cared for and has no apparent reason to continue to hoard food. Unfortunately, child neglect often leaves a child insecure, seeing himself as unworthy of care and lacking in a sense of partnership with foster-adoptive parents. They may not feel that their foster-adoptive parents are available and sensitive, drawing this false conclusion from their previous "blueprint" of being victimized by negligent parenting.

When trying to positively impact food hoarding, we hope to move the child from solitary and secret self-parenting behavior to getting needs met within a healthy parent-child relationship. We want to avoid drawing battle lines around food. If we lock the pantry, the refrigerator, the kitchen, we create a "mine and yours" mentality, one the child is very familiar with from the past. Designing family interventions should be preceded by a close look at the child's motivation for hoarding food, which is to at all costs avoid food deprivation caused by neglect.

Several examples of interventions that are designed to focus on the function of neglect-based food hoarding include:

FOOD BASKETS: Provide food baskets in the home – created with the child's input – consisting of snacks that are healthy and appealing to the child. The child should be told the food baskets will be refilled and are a better alternative than hoarding. If the child hoards the food basket, set limits, but do not discontinue the basket idea. Some schools will also cooperate with keeping food baskets in the classroom, especially if the child is prone to taking other students' snacks.

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1624 Statewide Regional Foster Parent Representatives

REGION 1

Cindy Gardner
rc.gardner@comcast.net
home 509-928-2040
cell 509-714-6961

Kristen Otoupalik
Otoupaliks@yahoo.com
509-244-9957

REGION 2

Mary-Jeanne Smith
smithhomes@hotmail.com
509-876-6245

Victoria Erwin
Victoriaerwin9@yahoo.com
509-386-2423

REGION 3

Debra Ellsworth
dkfoster3@gmail.com
360-941-2244

Shala Crow
fosterhearts@hotmail.com
360-220-3785

REGION 4

Tess Thomas
TMT3000@aol.com
206-371-0974

Talya Miller
mytie5683@aol.com
206-786-1491

REGION 5

Barbara Holbrook
blynnholbrook@gmail.com
360-649-0414

Elizabeth Griffin Hall
elizanngriffin@aol.com
h: 360-876-7515
w: 253-473-9252

REGION 6

Amy Gardner
michaelamy52@msn.com
360-200-2102

Marci Miess
marcimiess@hotmail.com
360-880-5330

BACKPACKS: When packing lunches for school or events, pack a special container of food that can be removed and kept with the child. This provides a traveling sense of food security and food availability for the child.

COUPLING NURTURING WITH EATING: Always positively reinforce any progress the child makes in curbing hoarding behavior. If the child utilizes a food basket, nurture the child when he seeks items from the food basket. Positively comment on how all family members are always fed. Weave this message into mealtimes and have this message commented on by various family members.

TEACH FOOD REGULATION: If the child has a tendency to gorge, set a “food time out” after a complete meal is consumed. Make certain this applies to all family members. The goal is to assist the child in learning to experience a sense of fullness. The food time out should not be presented as denying food but rather delaying additional eating for a prescribed period of time. Describe the physical sensation of fullness. Fifteen minutes is about how long it takes to feel full.

As with all behavioral and emotional challenges, a child’s special needs and individual circumstances should be considered when

designing interventions. Additionally, professional therapeutic assistance can offer help in the assessment and treatment of food issues. In an effort to understand the function of food hoarding, the following questions can assist in a parent’s understanding of their child’s food hoarding.

- Could there be psychiatric or biological issues contributing to the hoarding?
- Does the child’s history reveal reasons for fixation on eating?
- Does the child substitute a food fixation for a loving relationship with parents?
- Are there things that trigger eating problems in the child?
- Is the child displaying an emotional neediness in the way he eats?

It is important to understand how the child’s food issues impact you as a parent. Become aware of your own food issues and explore if they influence your ability or willingness to look at the child’s problem with an open mind and creative flexibility. Also, study yourself to determine if the child’s food hoarding personally threatens your role as a provider and nurturer.

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IN BRIEF

The science of early childhood development

FIRST IN THE SERIES



Caregiver Connection begins a four-part series on some amazing research. The science of early childhood development is a focus at Harvard University’s Center on the Developing Child. In November, Washington state leaders met to focus on the benefits of applying the science of early childhood development to state policy and practice.

The series begins with The Foundation of Lifelong Health, and continues in following editions with: The Science of Early Childhood Development, The Impact of Adversity on Children’s Development and Early Childhood Program Effectiveness.

It begins with this brief overview:

A vital and productive society with a prosperous and sustainable future is built on a foundation of healthy child development. Positive early experiences provide a foundation for sturdy brain architecture and a broad range of skills and learning capacities. Health in the earliest years – beginning with the future mother’s well-being before she becomes pregnant – strengthens developing biological systems that enable children to thrive and grow up to be healthy adults. The science of child development now helps us to see healthy development as a causal chain.

Policies and programs across the public and private sectors affect the capacities of caregivers and communities to strengthen three foundations of healthy development:

- stable, responsive relationships;
- safe, supportive environments; and
- appropriate nutrition.

These foundations, in turn, trigger physiological adaptations or disruptions that influence lifelong outcomes in health, learning, and behavior. Understanding how each link in this chain affects the others can provide a science-based framework for decisions about policies, systems, and practices that support the health of all young children and their families.

There is a tremendous amount of information available all caregivers of young children will appreciate and can utilize. Click here more information about this subject: <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/>

Night of a thousand dreams

The 2011 Night of 1000 Dreams honorees were:

- Steve Duvall, CA social worker from Moses Lake, whose "compassion for children and families is evident in his gentleness with the children and his firm but caring manner with the families." Steve prioritizes his work to provide a complete social service to all on his case load without seeming rushed in his interpersonal communications.
- Erin Scheideman, is a licenser in Walla Walla for the private agency Service Alternatives of Washington. Ms. Scheideman worked for CA for 13 years, was a former foster parent and also an adoptive parent. She was described by those who know her as someone, "who has a huge heart and is dearly loved and respected by foster parents throughout the area."
- Nacole Patterson, CA adoption social worker from Everett, who is described by one co-worker as "truly committed to kids. She puts kids first and really listens to them." Nacole has become active in Camp To Belong (CTB), and advocating for other social workers to come to camp as a counselor and experience the bond of siblings being together.
- Kim Johnson, CA licenser in Kent, is "an energetic go-getter who doesn't see a problem without trying to find a solution," said Ruth Graham, long-time foster and adoptive parent and liaison for foster parents. Kim helped write a guide for new foster parents to provide them with nuts-and-bolts information about the system. Her attitude is 'you can't count the time, you count the outcomes.'
- Tacoma's Margaret Wilkins', life and work experience have included many titles: Facilitator for Family Team Decision Meetings, social worker, child guidance specialist, foster parent, and Girl Scout troop leader. "Margaret goes above and beyond when it involves children. She is invested with kids becoming successful adults," said her co-worker Marta Roberts.
- Debbie Conway, of Vancouver, brings invaluable experience to the child welfare system. Debbie staffs the DSHS/CA Parent Partner Program in Clark County, which has become a national model for parent engagement. The program utilizes successfully reunified birth parents to educate, support and encourage parents whose children are currently in foster care to work toward reunification.

The Caregiver Connection this month highlights those who were honored by the Foster Parents Association of Washington State (FPAWS) at the group's Second Annual "Night of a Thousand Dreams." held on January 17. Attorney General, Rob McKenna, served as Master of Ceremonies for the event. Each award recipient was recognized for their outstanding work and commitment with a framed picture of the galaxy and the personalization of a star in their honor. FPAWs Co-President Beth Canfield told the crowd, "These awards are meant to recognize the great work that is being done by many."

Joe and Marie Frauenheim of Issaquah, owners of the UL-72 "Foster Care-Change a Lifetime" Unlimited Lite hydroplane and driver Kaleigh Perkins Mallory greeted those attending the event.

BEST PRACTICES AWARD: Camp To Belong Washington

One of the best practices in the child welfare system is placing brothers and sisters in the same home whenever possible. When that is not possible, keeping them connected is critical. Camp To Belong Washington (CTB) does just that, by giving separated siblings a five-day summer camp experience created to build a bond for what will likely be their longest life relationship. Under the leadership of Deb Kennedy and April VanGesen CTB gives kids what they want and need – connection to their siblings.

Andrew, a former camper said it best when he stood before a camp fire in 2010: "Camp has been a life changing experience for me. Miracles happen here."



BOB PARTLOW AWARD: Laurie Palmquist, Region 1 - Spokane

Laurie Palmquist, program manager with the Division of Licensed Resources in Region 1, has repeatedly demonstrated over her years with CA an unwavering commitment to caregivers and the kids they serve.

She has been very involved with multiple conferences that support foster parents and caregivers. She is an absolute master at finding people and organizations who will donate items for caregivers and kids. She is one of those people who, if we could clone her, we would not have to worry about taking care of caregivers; it would already be done.

DANIELLE AND STEVEN BAXTER AWARDS: Mary Meinig, Office of the Family and Children's Ombudsman and The Perkins Coie Law Firm, Seattle

Mary Meinig, Director of the Office of Family and Children's Ombudsman (OFCO) has served as an ombudsman since the inception of the office in 1997. The office intervenes in cases in which it determines that an agency's action or inaction is unauthorized or unreasonable. In addition to addressing complaints, the office works to identify system-wide issues and recommend appropriate changes in public reports to the Governor, Legislature and agency officials.

Mary Meinig serves in that role with grace and compassion. Mary takes the charge of the office seriously; her leadership and personal style ensures that each complaint is handled with concern, compassion and courage. With Mary Meinig at the helm, the Office has made a genuine difference in outcomes for children and families. The Perkins Coie Law Firm of Seattle was also honored for their leadership and generosity, and for their service to the children and foster families in Washington State.

ELECTED OFFICIAL AWARD: U.S. Representative Jim McDermott – Seattle

Representative Jim McDermott of Seattle was recognized for his advocacy on behalf of foster parents and children in the foster care system. The FPAWS recognition stated, "Congressman McDermott's advocacy for foster children and the families who offer them a home has been unfailing and continuous."

Important numbers to know when you take care of children in out-of-home care

Foster Parent and Caregiver Crisis and Support Line: 1-800-301-1868

ON-GOING AND CRISIS SUPPORTS FOR FOSTER PARENTS

Under contracts with the state, three private agencies are working to build supports for you within the foster care community. Supports include hubs, support groups, and matching new foster parents with veteran foster parents. To get connected:

- If you live in Eastern Washington, the Olympic Peninsula down through Pacific County or from Thurston County to Clark County, call 1-888-794-1794.
- If you live in King County or any counties north of King County, call 206-605-0664.
- If you live in Pierce or Kitsap counties, call 253-473-9252.
- If you live in King County, the Friends of Youth CARE program provides short-term counseling, education and support to help you care for your most difficult children. 1-888-263-3457 or 206-915-0459.

Family Help Line: 1-800-932-HOPE or www.parenttrust.org. The Family Help Line is a free, statewide training and referral line for the families of Washington state. Last year, the Family Help Line received more than 5,000 calls and requests for information. Calls can last up to 90 minutes and parents can call as often as needed.

Support for foster parents under investigation for allegations of abuse or neglect: Foster Parent Investigation Retention Support Team (FIRST) 253-219-6782. Monday through Saturday, 8:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m., or leave a message and receive a return call within 24 hours.

Foster Parent and Caregiver Crisis and Support Line: 1-800-301-1868

Mental Health Crisis Line Information: The crisis line telephone number for your county or region is available on the DSHS Mental Health Division website at: <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/mentalhealth/crisis.shtml>.

GENERAL FOSTER PARENT INFORMATION FOR THE STATE OF WASHINGTON

FPAWS: Foster Parent Association of Washington State is an all volunteer non-profit association. It is led by experienced caregivers who provide support and helpful services to all caregivers (foster, adoptive, and kinship) in Washington State. In addition, FPAWS advocates for caregivers with Washington's legislative officials, all levels of Children's Administration staff and other community service providers to enhance the child welfare system. Contact FPAWS at fpaws.org or 1-800-391-CARE (2273).

Kitsap and Pierce County information about becoming a foster parent or to receive foster parent support: Foster Care Resource Network, 253-473-9252. Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. or leave a message and receive a return call by the next business day.

RESOURCE INFORMATION AVAILABLE STATEWIDE

Get connected to information on resources in your area by calling 211 – a toll free number.

Girl Scouts of Western Washington: Fostering a Future: MeccaYS@girlscouts.org

Women, Infant and Children Program (WIC):

<http://www.parenthelp123.org/resources/food-resources>

Children's Administration Foster Parent Website: <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/>

Children's Administration Foster Parent Training Website – Trainings are open to all licensed foster parents, licensed relative caregivers and unlicensed caregivers. For information about foster parent and caregiver training, check out:

<http://www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/training.asp>

CHILDREN'S ADMINISTRATION FOSTER CARE LISTSERV

Join the 2,200 people who have subscribed to the List Serve

<http://listserv.wa.gov/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=fosterparents&&A=1> for updated information on resources for the work you do in caring for children.

Family Planning Services are designed to help avoid unwanted or mistimed pregnancy and are available through your local Community Service Office (CSO). Each CSO has a full time Family Planning Nurse to help provide services to Medicaid eligible clients.

There is also a Family Planning hotline number 1-800-770-4334.



Take me out to the ball game

Mark Sunday, May 8, on your calendar! This is CA's big day for foster parent and caregiver recognition as part of National Foster Care Month.

Again this year, the Mariners will make discount tickets available for the event. May 8th is Mother's Day, so this could be a wonderful opportunity to take mom out to see a great game.

More information will be provided in the next newsletter and in the Foster Parent Listserv. To join the listserv, go to this link: <http://listserv.wa.gov/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=fosterparents&&A=1+>



Questions and answers

Do you have questions about investigations done by the Division of Licensed Resources Child Protective Services?

Click here for information: <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/investigating.asp>

Are you on a tight budget? Does your food budget need a boost?

Check out the Women, Infant and Children's (WIC) program, the nutrition program for women, infants and children and intended for:

- Foster children under age 5 or pregnant teens in foster care.
- Other children under age five.
- Yourself if you are pregnant or breastfeeding

Click here for more information: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/wic/apply.htm>

More information about the WIC program will be coming in the March Caregiver Connection.